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Wednesday, March 3, 2021

Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Daugherty Abrams, Representative Barry, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, and members of the Education Committee:

Thank you for accepting my testimony in support of SB 948, *An Act Addressing Education Funding and Racial Equity in Connecticut*.

I am testifying in strong support of this proposal because it works to equitably fund our state's school by investing millions of dollars in underfunded districts, implementing a data driven needs-based formula that will better serve our local schools in Ansonia and Derby, which have been underfunded for decades. This also more equitably funds magnet, charter, and vocational-technical schools across the state, without siphoning funds from our traditional schools.

Ansonia and Derby are the first and fifth most economically-distressed municipalities in the State of Connecticut. They are also classified as Alliance Districts and Priority School Districts, and it should be noted that the Derby School District is designated as an Opportunity District. In Ansonia, 68 percent of students are designated as economically disadvantaged, 5 percent are English Language Learners, and 70 percent are students of color. In Derby, 72 percent are economically disadvantaged, 3 percent are English Language Learners, and 52 percent are students of color. In both school districts, 100 percent of students qualify for free and reduced lunch. In both districts, while we have seen millions in increased ECS funds in recent years, we are still underfunded and must not delay in securing more.

Students in these districts are so much more than numbers. They have aspirations and dreams. Prior to COVID-19, I would visit the schools to read to our youngest students on Dr. Seuss Day and participate in various school activities, such as science fairs, holiday observance events, and class presentations. I would always ask the little ones what they wanted to be when they grew up. They spoke of becoming doctors and nurses, veterinarians, police officers, and teachers. One soft-spoken and bright little boy, who just celebrated his ninth birthday, wants to become President of the United States. I shared with this boy that he must work hard and do well in school so that he can serve people well and achieve his dreams. I asked him what he wanted to do to help others if he becomes President. He said he wants to make sure everyone has a home.

We owe it to this little boy, and every child in my district and our state, to provide them with a high-quality, fully-funded and equitable education, so that they have every opportunity to reach their dreams and full potential. My children in Ansonia and Derby are just as deserving of proper funding and an enriching education full of opportunity as any child in any other school. Not in 10 years, not in 5 years, but immediately.

For decades, Ansonia and Derby schools have not received their fair share of funding and if the legislature does not act, will not be fully funded until 2028 based on the current ECS formula. A student like our young future president will be in high school by the time the district would see its fully funding. That time frame is unacceptable—the state must do better.

The proposed changes to the ECS formula detailed in SB 948 would provide Ansonia, for example, with an estimated \$21.8 million in ECS funding in fiscal year 2022. This is approximately \$3.6 million more than current funding levels. This is funding that would dramatically improve the educational experience provided to students. It would allow Ansonia to lower class sizes and improve the teacher to pupil ratio, better address the social-emotional needs of students by hiring more counselors and paraprofessionals, and provide more diverse course offerings and upgrade outdated technology, among many other initiatives. This funding would make it possible for enriching extracurricular programs that the state's more affluent and better-funded school districts enjoy.

SB 948 takes the bold, necessary steps Ansonia, Derby, and our state needs to reverse decades of backwards policies that have deprived economically disadvantaged students of an enriching and challenging education. Let's make sure each student in Ansonia and Derby, as well as every other student in our state, gets to reach their dreams, and that their potential is not limited by their zip code and school funding level. It is my greatest hope that someday I get to see the children we serve in Ansonia and Derby—who wish to be teachers, doctors, police officers, veterinarians, and even President—reach their dreams, and that we provide them every educational opportunity to do so. Our society would be better for it.

I respectfully urge committee members to support SB 948 and guarantee a more just and equitable education for each student in Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of this bill, as well as your time, attention, and consideration.

Sincerely,



State Representative Kara Rochelle
Proudly serving the 104th Assembly District